Finch & Co



TWO INDONESIAN SOUTH SULAWESI TORAJA 'TAU TAU' CARVED 'NANGKA' FRUIT WOOD MALE ANCESTOR FIGURES

TWO INDONESIAN SOUTH SULAWESI TORAJA 'TAU TAU' CARVED 'NANGKA' FRUIT WOOD MALE ANCESTOR FIGURES THE EYES INLAID WITH BONE THE ARTICULATED LOWER ARMS LOST

FIRST HALF 20TH CENTURY

SIZES:

A: 137CM HIGH – 54 INS HIGH / 142CM HIGH – 56 INS HIGH (INCLUDING BASE)

B: 70CM HIGH – 27.5 INS HIGH / 75CM HIGH – 29.5 INS HIGH (INCLUDING BASE)

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LITERATURE

A COMPELLING AND POWERFUL FUNERARY ARTISTIC FORM, 'TAU TAU' ARE THE SHADOW OF THE SOUL OF THE DECEASED THAT FOR THE TORAJA ALSO REPRESENT AND DEPICT THE QUINTESSENCE OF LIFE. THE FABRICATION OF AN IMAGE IS RESTRICTED TO CEREMONIES COMMEMORATING THE DEATHS OF NOBLE, HIGH STATUS INDIVIDUALS OR WEALTHY MEN. MADE FROM THE SPECIAL FRUITWOOD OF THE JACKFRUIT OR 'NANGKA' TREE WHICH IS HARVESTED ACCORDING TO PRESCRIBED PROCEDURES, THE 'TAU TAU' FUNCTIONS AS A GENERIC PORTRAIT OF THE DECEASED WITH ITS IDENTITY ESTABLISHED BY CLOTHING RATHER THAN FACIAL FEATURES.

FEASTING IS ALWAYS DEDICATED TO THE ANCESTORS AND THE LARGEST OCCUR AT FUNERALS WHICH INVOLVE ALL KNOWN RELATIONS PAST AND PRESENT, ALL OF WHOM ARE EITHER PHYSICALLY OR RITUALLY INCLUDED. ONLY FOR THE MOST IMPORTANT 'SEVEN NIGHT' FUNERALS ARE THE 'TAU TAU' COMMISSIONED AND EMPLOYED. THESE EVENTS ARE CAREFULLY PLANNED OVER MONTHS, AND SOMETIMES YEARS, AFTER THE DEATH. THE CORPSE REMAINS IN THE HOME WHILST NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE SURVIVORS OF THE DECEASED DETERMINE THE RESPECTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF SACRIFICIAL PIGS AND WATER BUFFALO, THE DISTRIBUTION OF INHERITED RICE LAND RIGHTS AND THE CULTIVATION AND HARVEST OF THE RICE CROP, SYMBOLIC OF LIFE. NO FUNERAL CEREMONIES ARE EVER HELD WHEN THE RICE IS STILL GROWING. WHEN THE SCALE OF THE FUNERAL AND ALL THE PLANS FOR IT HAVE BEEN FINALISED THEN THE CARVING OF THE IMAGE COMMENCES.

IT TAKES FOUR TO SIX WEEKS TO COMPLETE A SINGLE 'TAU TAU' FIGURE AND DURING ITS MANUFACTURE THE CARVER SLEEPS NEAR OR UNDER THE HOUSE WHERE THE CADAVER LAYS IN STATE. AFTER IT IS FURNISHED IT IS SET BESIDE THE DECEASED AND RITUALLY OFFERED FOOD. DURING FUNERAL RITUALS IT IS CONSECRATED WITH PRAYERS AND PIGS BLOOD TO BECOME 'THE SOUL THAT IS SEEN', AND THEN CARRIED IN PROCESSION NEAR THE CORPSE BEFORE BEING PLACED IN A CARVED BALCONY FRONTING THE BURIAL CHAMBER CARVED HIGH IN A ROCKY LIMESTONE CLIFF. VISIBLE FROM BELOW THE 'TAU TAU' WATCHES OVER THE LIVING AND REMINDS THEM TO OBSERVE ANCESTRAL CUSTOMS.

THESE IMAGES CAN SURVIVE FOR DECADES EXPOSED TO THE ELEMENTS, REFURBISHED AND REPAIRED EVERY TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OR SO BY THE FAMILIES WHO CARE FOR THEM. THEY ARE A SURVIVING INDIGENOUS ART FORM SERVING AS A LINK TO PREVIOUS GENERATIONS, GUIDING ACTIVITIES IN THE PRESENT AND DETERMINING PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE.

PROVENANCE

COLLECTED BY AN ENGLISH DIPLOMATIC FAMILY IN A VILLAGE IN SOUTH SULAWESI DURING THE EARLY 1950'S

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EX PRIVATE ENGLISH COLLECTION

CF: A SIMILAR FIGURE IN THE FRED & RITA RICHMAN COLLECTION, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK, USA 1988.143.91

BBC DOCUMENTARY FILM 'WAY OF THE ANCESTORS' 1976 NOTE THE LATER 20TH CENTURY IMAGES ALWAYS HAVE DETACHABLE SEXUAL PARTS